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ABSTRACT

Changes in colleges of further education over recent years, including the involvement of a much wider range of students, mean that provision of basic skills has become an important issue for most colleges in England and Wales. Some colleges provide no basic skills support for students; others have some support for students; and still others also make provision for adults living in the local area. Those students who need some basic skills support include older students and unemployed young people and adults. Companies who need workplace basic skills training will also seek to contract experienced providers, such as colleges. The steps in developing programs in colleges are as follows: (1) establishing a policy; (2) assessing the need; (3) providing learning support; (4) making community-based provision; (5) acquiring or developing learning material; (6) providing accreditation; (7) providing staff development and training; (8) funding; and (9) evaluating effectiveness. The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit can help colleges develop basic skills work through consultancy, local development projects, staff development and training, and learning material. (YLB)

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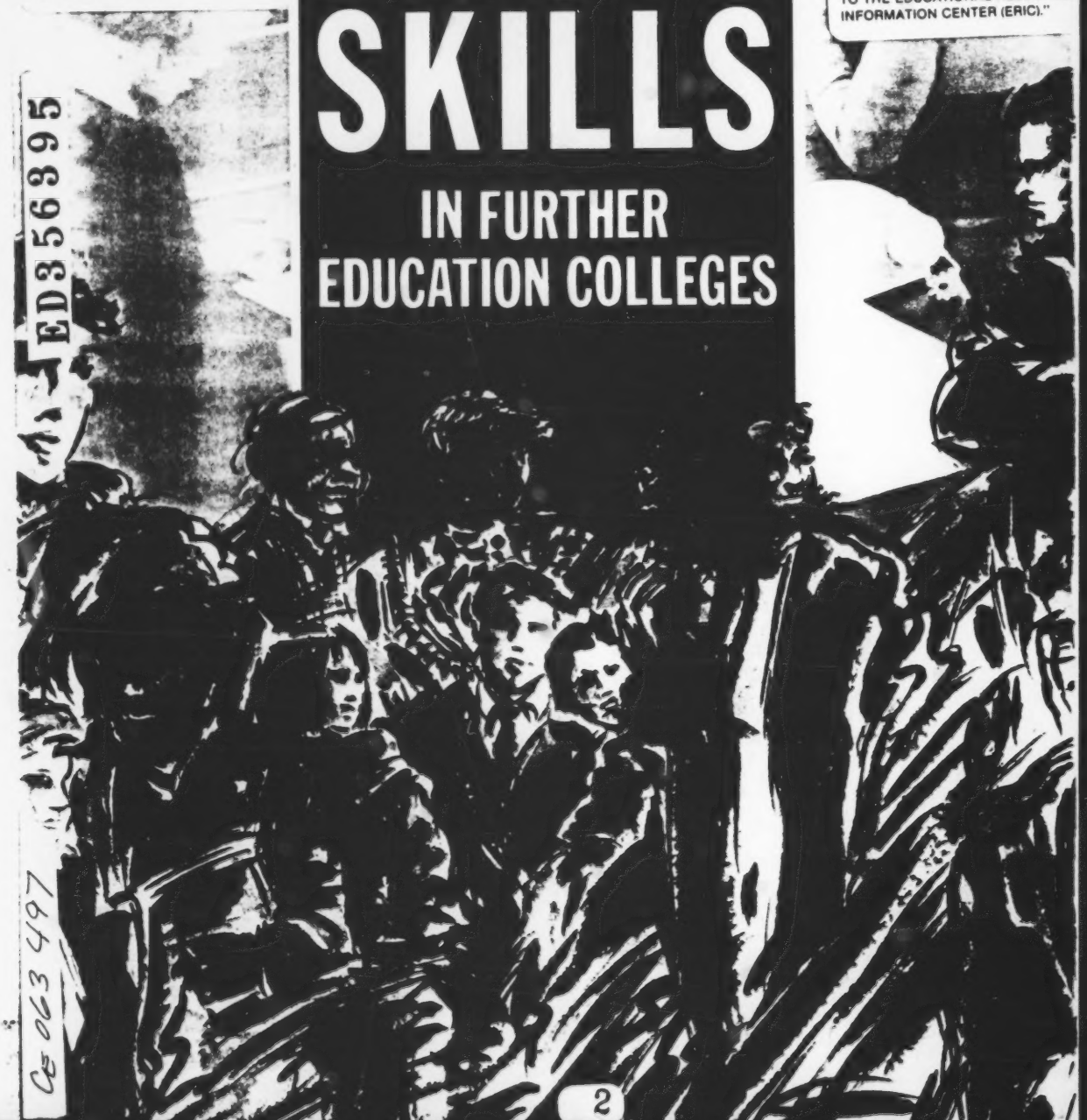
BASIC SKILLS

IN FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES



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BASIC SKILLS

IN FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES

ALBSU acknowledges the contribution to this publication of the Special Development Project at Wakefield District College.

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FOREWORD

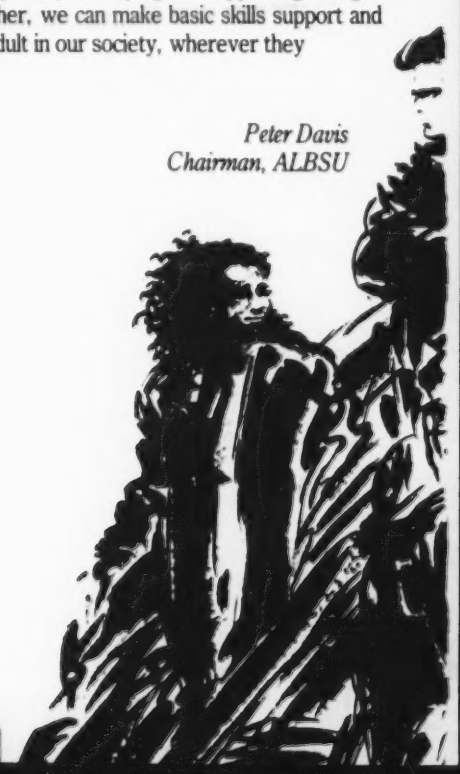
COLLEGES of further education have an important role to play in making sure that high quality basic skills provision exists in every area of England and Wales. Making opportunities available for every young person and adult who wants to improve these crucial skills is ALBSU's commitment for the 1990s, but we can't do it alone. Small national agencies like ALBSU do not teach anyone. So we need your help.

'*Basic Skills in Further Education Colleges*' describes why high quality basic skills provision is an essential part of the work of colleges of further education, and outlines how provision might be developed over the next few years. We support the development of community colleges, accessible, open and able to meet a range of need in the local community and we are committed to helping colleges strengthen their basic skills provision over the next few years.

Current basic skills provision meets very little of the likely need and unless we mobilise all of the resources available in the 1990s, we will continue as an under-educated and under-skilled nation well into the next century. If this happens, the UK will find it increasingly difficult to compete with other industrialised countries in a fiercely competitive marketplace. Perhaps just as importantly the health and welfare of our society will suffer because too many parents, consumers and citizens are not confident in using essential basic skills.

I know that many colleges of further education are already key players in basic skills. The development of basic skills support through workshops and team teaching is encouraging. I hope that '*Basic Skills and Further Education Colleges*' will give an impetus to further development. Certainly ALBSU will give a high priority to helping and supporting colleges which want to develop basic skills work. Together, we can make basic skills support and provision a reality for every young person and adult in our society, wherever they live, whatever their reason for learning.

Peter Davis
Chairman, ALBSU



1

BASIC SKILLS
What are they?

By basic skills ALBSU means:

> *'the ability to read, write, and speak in English and use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general.'*

In Wales, basic skills includes the ability to read and write Welsh for people whose first language or mother tongue is Welsh.

The range of basic skills need is wide and includes young people and adults:

- *who can read hardly at all*
- *with such limited reading skills that they can only read and understand simple information*
- *who can read not too badly but find writing and spelling very difficult*
- *who have difficulty with number work at the level of the four rules*
- *who have problems with more advanced mathematics at a level below a qualification in maths*
- *whose first language is not English and who need English tuition or language support.*

Basic skills are crucial skills necessary in almost every aspect of life in the UK. They are the essential 'gateway' skills to further education, training and employment and the key foundation for young people and adults following courses of education and training.

A significant number of people in the UK have problems with basic skills, as they do in many industrialised countries. The best estimate suggests that about 13% of adults – some six million people – have problems with reading, writing and/or basic maths. Surveys of Employment Training (ET) and Youth Training (YT) trainees suggest that at least 1 in 5 need some basic skills support and 1 in 20 have such serious difficulties that intensive help with basic skills is essential.

There is also a sizeable need for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in many areas of England and Wales. National research by ALBSU in 1989 indicated that at least 500,000 people who did not speak English as their mother tongue needed help to learn or improve English. Although a significant number of those interviewed said that they would like help with English an alarming proportion were unaware that any help was available. It would be nice to report that the level of need is diminishing, but it is likely that the reverse is true.

Changes in colleges of further education over recent years, including the involvement of a much wider range of students, mean that provision of basic skills has become an important issue for most colleges in England and Wales. In a recent example, for instance, of 450 new full-time students screened in one college, 40% were identified as having basic skills needs.

It is important to distinguish between the needs of students requiring basic skills support and those of special needs students. Adults and young people with special needs require wide ranging educational opportunities rather than the opportunity to improve a fairly specific set of skills. Special needs students may include people with both mild and severe learning difficulties, those with physical disabilities, such as partial sight or hearing, and those recovering from mental illness.

"About 13% of adults – some six million people – have problems with reading, writing and/or basic maths."

While some young people and adults with special needs do need help with communication skills, including literacy, others do not. What is clear is that most need a wide ranging, rather than a narrowly focussed, curriculum. The primary aim of basic skills work is to help young people and adults improve essential communication and numerical skills and including 'special needs' work as part of basic skills (or describing basic skills students as special needs students) is not helpful or logical.

"At least 500,000 people who do not speak English as their mother tongue need help to learn or improve English."

Increasingly employers are aware of the need for good basic skills within their workforce. They realise that basic skills are important because of:

- *the pace of change in British industry, including the introduction of new technology and changes in the organisation of work*
- *the need to retrain staff to enable them to cope with new work practices and roles*
- *the cost of poor basic skills to industry through poor product quality, limited job mobility, high staff turnover, industrial accidents, etc.*

2

BASIC SKILLS

An important issue for Colleges of Further Education

Many colleges are already involved in basic skills through:

- *learning support for full and part-time college students*
- *specific access courses and programmes*
- *'dedicated' literacy, numeracy and ESOL programmes for people in the local community*
- *provision of literacy and numeracy for trainees on YT and ET.*

At present, however, the picture in England and Wales is patchy. Some colleges provide almost no basic skills support for students and are not involved in making community based provision. Others have established support for students but do not make 'dedicated' provision for adults living in the local area because this has historically been the role of a 'free-standing' LEA adult or community education service. Increasingly, however, colleges are involved in all three aspects of basic skills work and over 50% of all basic skills students in England and Wales are receiving tuition through colleges of further education.

Students starting a college course are usually presented with a mass of new information. They are introduced to a course vocabulary, with which they must quickly become familiar. They are expected to take greater responsibility for their own learning and to be self disciplined. There is an increasing emphasis on self study and independent learning.

Not all new college students are young people who have just left compulsory schooling, however. Adults make up a larger percentage of the student body of many colleges of further education every year as the value of education and training is emphasised. Some are going to college to retrain and update job skills and have the active support of their employers.

Others are unemployed adults who are in college as part of Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) funded training programmes or through similar local initiatives. Some are unwaged people studying for the first time since leaving school or returning to study after a prolonged break. Most have a range of skills and life experience to draw on although they may need help to develop study skills relevant to the very different environment which now faces them.

Today's college students are expected to be able to cope with a wide variety of tasks which demand high levels of skills including:

- *note taking*
- *writing essays*
- *summarising information*
- *undertaking independent assignments*
- *gaining access to information from text books and other sources*
- *accessing and retrieving information.*

"Of course, we know that some students have a problem, we just can't do anything about it within the time constraints."

Engineering Course Lecturer

Some lecturers are unaware of the demands they are making on students when they present them with what they consider to be straightforward tasks. Even if they are aware that some students need help, there is often too little time to deal with individual needs in a busy schedule. For example, one engineering course lecturer commented during the course of an ALBSU Consultancy Review of basic skills provision at his college that 'of course we know that some of the students have a problem, we just can't do anything about it within the time constraints.'

Without some basic skills support, however, many students will not achieve their potential. In some cases the frustration and feelings of failure find other expression such as students:

- *being disruptive*
- *appearing to be lazy*
- *lacking motivation*
- *avoiding tasks which involve reading or writing*
- *not completing essays or assignments*
- *dropping out of courses*
- *failing all or parts of the course.*

"There is a growing demand for return to study courses and many adults taking these courses need some basic skills support."

Rusty basic skills may be a particular problem for older students. Lack of demand for communication and numerical skills at work, and the very different standards required when they left school, may mean that extra support is required if they are to succeed in college. Most returning adults do not have a literacy problem; rather the standards of skill required have changed. Some new students, whether young or older, are reluctant to reveal any difficulties with reading, writing, spelling and maths to college staff.

They may hope that they can 'get by', remember essential information, and succeed in hiding their need for support. In the case of ESOL students, needs may be more apparent. Students may not be embarrassed about their lack of skills, but, unless policy and provision of language support is made widely known to them, they are at risk of not participating in support structures.

There is also a growing demand for return to study courses and many adults taking these courses need some basic skills support. Often they have 'rusty' or inadequately developed basic skills, but, with help, can progress very rapidly. Many returners want recognised accreditation of their learning. They also want to be able to see clear progression routes to other courses in the college, to vocational and occupational training or to higher education.

TECs recognise that a significant number of unemployed young people and adults, particularly those who have been unemployed for some time, need basic skills training if they are to be able to get jobs. Whilst the scale of need is different from area to area, some TECs which have conducted surveys believe that as many as 50% of all unemployed people need basic skills training. Although basic skills learning opportunities for unemployed people are still too limited, TECs are likely to look increasingly to established educational and training institutions, such as colleges, to provide this specialist provision.

Workplace basic skills training is still relatively poorly developed in the UK. What training does exist in the workplace is largely directed at senior and middle managers and attention to the needs of unskilled and semi-skilled employees has been very poor. Yet we know that eight out of ten of the workforce in the year 2000 are already in the working population and that demographic trends mean that we will need to attract more people into the workforce. Skill shortages and gaps pose serious problems for British industry and without better training, including essential basic skills training, it is doubtful if we will be able to compete with our major competitors abroad.

There will be an increase in workplace basic skills training over the next few years. Major companies in the United States and Canada, such as Motorola and Kodak, now recognise the need for basic skills training and have established high quality programmes within the workplace; experience leads us to believe that this will be replicated in the UK. Of course, some companies will provide basic skills training 'in-house'; most, however, will seek to contract experienced providers, such as colleges, which can match basic skills training to the needs of a particular industry with particular employees.

3

BASIC SKILLS
Developing provision in colleges

Establishing a Policy

BASIC skills is often provided in several areas of a college's service delivery including as part of:

- *communication skills or maths workshops*
- *adult or community education*
- *YT or ET provision*
- *Special Needs work.*

Often a number of different staff in various parts of the college are involved in delivering basic skills. Largely this reflects the history of the development of basic skills work in colleges, as well as a recognition that all staff should be aware of and understand basic skills needs. Usually colleges try to establish effective liaison between different sections and staff involved in basic skills, although this is sometimes difficult in large, widely spread institutions.

Some colleges are establishing more coherent support systems for basic skills students, through the development of cross college policies and strategies for basic skills, which acknowledge the important role of different sectors. A cross-college policy encourages effective and cost efficient learning support and avoids duplication and a waste of resources and effort.

For example, the mission statement of one college for flexible learning aims to 'organise and make readily available in the Learning Support Centre the widest possible range of resources (both human and physical) to facilitate students' learning.' To achieve this has meant bringing together the resources of the Library, Open Learning, Careers Guidance, Open Access and Basic Skills provision to increase access and improve usage. Other steps, including staffing changes and cross-college screening, have also been put in place with the active support of the senior management team and college governors.

The experience of this college has been that the move to a cross-curricular service, incorporating basic skills, has made provision much more effective. In the first six weeks of term 700 students made use of the Learning Support Centre. A significant number of the students using the Centre wanted help with basic skills.

Action Points

- Make sure that basic skills is included in the College Business Plan.
- Develop a cross-college policy for basic skills.
- Assign a member of the Senior Management Team to take an overview of basic skills work.
- Ask one of the Governors to take a specific interest in college basic skills work.
- Report at least annually to the College Governing Body on the provision of basic skills by the college.

Assessing the Need

DESPITE the development of National Records of Achievement, little information on the basic skills achievement levels of young people starting college is available. The introduction of the National Curriculum and Attainment Targets in schools may improve the information flow in future, although this is likely to take some time. Even if better information is available in future, however, it is clear that an increasing number of young people are likely to want to go to college and that some of these will need continued help to improve their basic skills.

Even less information about the educational attainment of older people, returning to study after a period in the workforce or caring for children, is available to colleges. Many left school some years ago and have 'rusty' skills. Often they are unused to formal learning and study. Without some form of initial assessment, many students will struggle unnecessarily and identification of need will be more by accident than by design.

Similarly, adults with English language needs may bring particular needs to colleges. The development of programmes of short, intensive language support will enable such students to cope with the language of instruction. There may also be a need for 'orientation' to help students from other cultures who will be unfamiliar with the educational styles and ethos of British institutions.

It is possible, of course, to leave the onus for seeking help entirely on the individual student. This passive approach involves establishing workshops which advertise that basic skills support is available and hoping that those who need help will seek it. This does not work very effectively, however. Peer group pressure, the stigma attached to admitting problems with basic skills, the perceived attitude of some staff, difficulties with course timetables and other factors combine to deter too many students from seeking support. Even when students do refer themselves, it is often later rather than sooner. As a design lecturer in one college put it, 'It isn't until they get into the course and start their assignment work that their lack of literacy and numeracy comes home to them. We often get them when they are already struggling...'

There are a number of distinctive advantages in initial screening.

- *The information gained adds weight to proposals for realistic funding for the development of basic skills support within the college.*
- *Screening offers a speedy way for staff to identify individuals, small groups and course groups who may need extra support.*
- *It encourages dialogue between staff in different sectors about student support.*
- *It allows progress to be more accurately assessed.*

It is important that screening new students to obtain information on support needs is *screening in* rather than screening out, particularly as if it is not handled sensitively, it can look like a neat way of denying access rather than encouraging it. Screening should not be pre-entry, but should take place after students have already enrolled in college and been accepted.

There are two main approaches to initial screening for basic skills in colleges: cross college screening and screening by course or sector. In deciding which approach to take individual colleges need to take account of the time and resources available to set up and administer screening procedures.

Each approach has advantages and disadvantages.

Cross College Screening

Advantages:

- Whole college approach
- Easier collation of results
- More effective information gained
- Easier to administer

Disadvantages:

- Not course specific
- Difficult to co-ordinate
- May be more insensitively applied.

"It is clear that an increasing number of young people are likely to want to go to college and that some of these will need continued help to improve their basic skills."

Course or Sector Screening

Advantages:

- Greater relevance to course
- Course staff more involved
- Timing can be staggered

Disadvantages:

- More difficult to administer
- More staff training needed
- Less consistency.

It is also important for a college to resolve:

- *who screens students and assesses whether support is required. If it is to be undertaken by the course tutor clear guidance will need to be available and staff given some training in assessment. Alternatively, workshop or other specialist staff could undertake screening and assessment although this may be time-consuming.*

- *how complex a screening procedure to use. The more involved the procedure is the longer it is likely to take, the more threatening it might appear and the more specialist knowledge is required.*

Different colleges use different methods for screening new students including:

- *cloze procedure*
- *multiple choice questions*
- *spelling tests*
- *a short writing activity*
- *multiple choice maths tests.*

Whatever method is used, it should be simple and common to all new students. Screening is a general assessment and should be used to identify where extra support is needed, not as a diagnostic procedure. The ALBSU Pack, *Assessing Reading*, contains cloze exercises which have been developed specifically for use in further education. It outlines a method by which the assessment can be made subject specific and it allows common assessment of all students to be made, while retaining some vocational focus. Using the skills of basic skills staff in the college, it is possible to ensure that the range of texts used correspond in reading level, and provide similar information.

The Unit will publish a *Basic Skills Assessment Pack* in 1992. This Pack consists of a number of tasks to be undertaken by students in order to identify those needing additional support with basic skills. The Pack is intended to be used for initial screening of basic skills competences, rather than provide detailed diagnostic information on students needing additional support.

Action Points

- Establish basic skills screening for new students.
- Ensure that all staff are aware of the rationale for basic skills screening and know how it operates.
- Make sure that all new students receive information on basic skills screening and on the support available.

Learning Support

SOME students with a very specific basic skills need can be supported and helped as part of a college course and a significant number of vocational course lecturers have taken training in basic skills to equip themselves to provide this kind of support. Often a student's difficulty is very specific and can be dealt with speedily through individual advice and support. Students can then often work at a particular difficulty or practise in their own time.

Some people need more specialist help and many colleges provide this support through workshops. Help with course work or more general basic skills support is provided outside the pressure of the course session, where timetable and curriculum constraints can make support more difficult. Specialist skills are needed to help college students who are really struggling because of the difficulties with basic skills, usually alongside help and support provided by a course tutor.

A good workshop needs to allow for flexibility of:

- *attendance*
- *provision*
- *learning programme.*

"There should be as much opportunity as possible for individual students to learn independently and without constant tutor support and supervision."

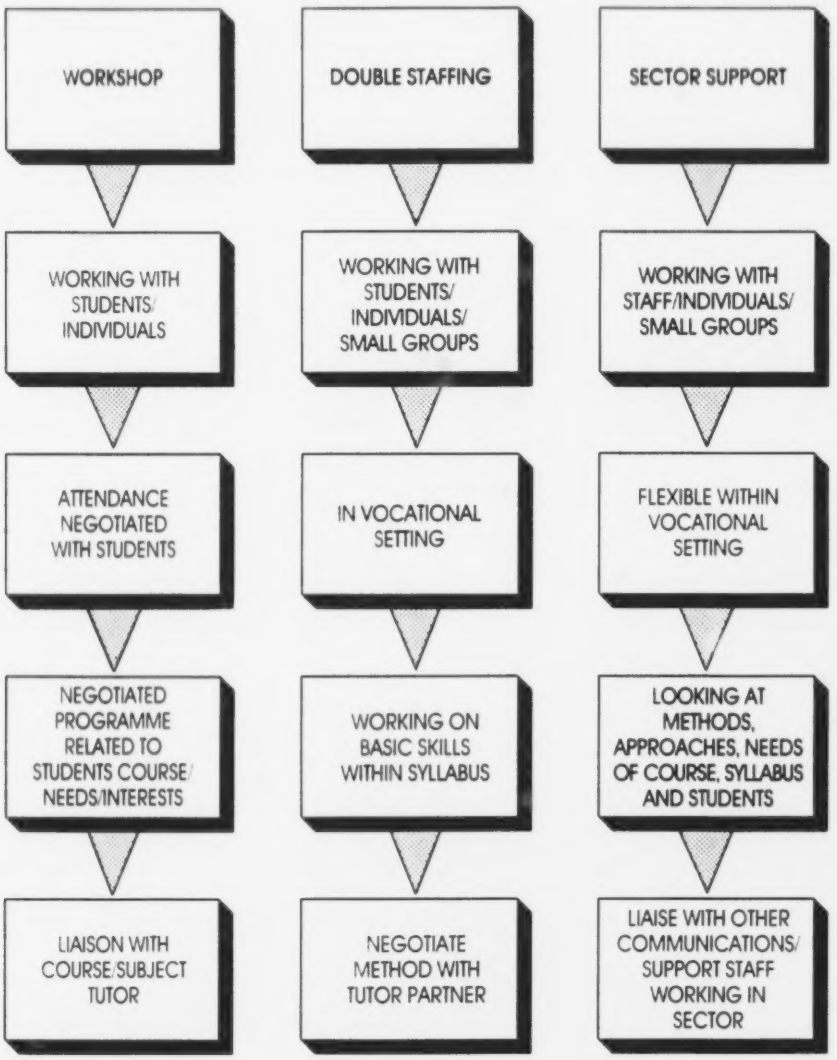
Workshops also need to be well sited in the college and not 'stuck away' in a less accessible, less well regarded part of the college. Ease of access is essential and a welcoming, non-threatening environment is a crucial element in the success or failure of a workshop. This is not the place to describe what a good college workshop needs, particularly as there are many such workshops around the country. What is worth emphasising is the need for a wide range of learning material, including access to technology, and as much opportunity as possible for individual students to learn independently and without constant tutor support and supervision.

However, experience has shown that some students are reluctant to use even the best workshops. Other approaches have to be used which allow more in-depth support with basic skills to be given to students as part of the course. Good liaison between workshop and course staff is essential if this is to work well. Nobody likes to be singled out as needing 'special treatment', and the stigma attached to poor basic skills can make this even more acute.

Some courses are likely to include a greater number of students with basic skills needs. For example, one college reported almost all students enrolled in a City & Guilds Community Care course as being in need of help with literacy and numeracy. The college provided basic skills support for this course by agreeing to timetable a member of the basic skills team into the course alongside the course tutor, on a regular basis. Similar models have been developed in order to cater for the needs of students with English language needs on an NNEB course. Other colleges have dealt with similar needs by timetabling course groups into Maths or English workshops to enable workshop staff to provide support alongside the course tutor.

A comprehensive model of support might include three strands:

- *workshop provision*
- *additional staffing within courses*
- *sector support.*


WORKSHOP
WORKING WITH STUDENTS/ INDIVIDUALS
ATTENDANCE NEGOTIATED WITH STUDENTS
NEGOTIATED PROGRAMME RELATED TO STUDENTS COURSE/ NEEDS/INTERESTS
LIAISON WITH COURSE/SUBJECT TUTOR
DOUBLE STAFFING
WORKING WITH STUDENTS/ INDIVIDUALS/ SMALL GROUPS
IN VOCATIONAL SETTING
WORKING ON BASIC SKILLS WITHIN SYLLABUS
NEGOTIATE METHOD WITH TUTOR PARTNER
SECTOR SUPPORT
WORKING WITH STAFF/INDIVIDUALS/ SMALL GROUPS
FLEXIBLE WITHIN VOCATIONAL SETTING
LOOKING AT METHODS, APPROACHES, NEEDS OF COURSE, SYLLABUS AND STUDENTS
LIAISE WITH OTHER COMMUNICATIONS/ SUPPORT STAFF WORKING IN SECTOR

Basic skills support should ideally ensure a variety of learning opportunities at the different points of delivery, including:

- *individual drop-in provision*
- *individually negotiated programmes*
- *short courses and modules*
- *workshops on specific topics*
- *specific inputs into vocational sessions*
- *distance learning.*

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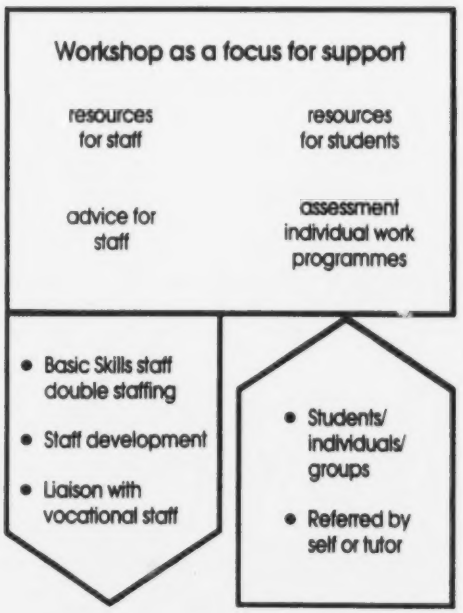

Workshop as a focus for support
resources for staff
resources for students
advice for staff
assessment individual work programmes
• Basic Skills staff double staffing
• Staff development
• Liaison with vocational staff
• Students/ individuals/ groups
• Referred by self or tutor

Learning support needs to take account of the different demands of courses at different times. Appropriate support should be made in response to these demands, for example:

- *coping with new vocabulary at the beginning of a course*
- *writing reports after going on work experience*
- *tackling exam questions/exam techniques near the end of a course.*

For students with ESOL needs, the range of support required is wide, and might include:

- *help with grammar, including understanding sentence structure*
- *practice in pronunciation, and understanding particular regional accents*
- *a greater need for the explanation of technical terms and 'jargon'*
- *support in language functions.*

The key to a student's success within a basic skills learning support workshop is the establishment of a coherent learning plan. A learning plan should be drawn up for a specific period, although clearly the level of detail included in a learning plan will vary depending on the support needed by a student. For example, students who want help with straightforward specific problems may only need help during one or two visits; once the problem has been dealt with they will stop coming. Other students with a more serious spelling problem, which requires several months' support, will need a more detailed learning plan including regular review sessions.

A learning plan should also attempt to estimate the level of staff support needed by a student getting help with basic skills. Some students will need a considerable amount of individual staff support, at least initially, whilst others can, with guidance, work fairly independently. Staff should be considered as an additional resource, available if required, but not continually sitting with students unless it is really necessary. The development of independence through open learning is important if students are to be able to cope with new literacy and numeracy demands in their course work and after college.

Action Points

- **Establish workshop provision for basic skills learning support.**
- **Ensure that workshops are accessible to all students, in terms of both timetable and location.**
- **Make sure that students know about the availability of learning support.**
- **Identify areas of the college service where additional staffing for basic skills may be necessary.**

Community Based Provision

SOME colleges have a long history of providing basic skills provision for people in the local community. A few started to provide adult literacy groups for local people wishing to improve their reading and writing skills at the time of the initial adult literacy campaign in 1975. In most single college LEAs, such as Wakefield, St Helens and Newham, the college is the major provider. In addition, a number of colleges have responsibility for adult and community based programmes, including the provision of basic skills for adults. Even in areas where a 'free standing' adult or community education service exists, colleges often make some basic skills provision.

Most colleges involved in community based basic skills work recognise that some adults will be reluctant to come in to college for help with basic skills. Others just can not get to the college on a regular basis, particularly in more rural areas or where public transport is poor. The concept of a community college means making provision accessible and most colleges now provide basic skills opportunities on a number of sites.

It is important, however, to ensure that progression routes to other college courses and programmes exist and that staff and students in community based provision are aware of the opportunities which are available. Community based basic skills provision is essential and it needs to be close to where students live. However, it shouldn't be seen as a 'detached' service unlinked to the other work of the college. Ensuring that staff work both in the community based basic skills provision and in the main college will prevent separateness and a sense of isolation.

Colleges will need to consider and plan for the most effective response to community need for basic skills provision. In many, particularly rural, areas it is not sensible or feasible to try and provide classes in each small town or village. The lessons from ALBSU sponsored projects suggest that community based basic skills provision must include at least the following elements:

- *continuous daytime and evening groups in centres of high population*
- *programmes of short courses in specific aspects of basic skills*
- *flexible and distance learning opportunities, usually co-ordinated from a central location.*

This combination of learning opportunities ensures that a potential student has a choice of learning styles. It also enables the college to make the most effective use of resources. Regular review of community based provision is essential, if the flexibility of approach and the ability of a college to respond quickly to perceived need is to be maintained.

Many colleges have established access programmes. These programmes help people who want to enter college to improve vocational skills, but who do not have the necessary qualifications or entry requirements. Non-standard entry to college courses is increasing as are college access courses to higher education. Although there are still too few access programmes in England and Wales, a variety of innovative programmes are being developed in different areas. Some colleges have developed joint programmes where basic skills staff have collaborated with colleagues in, for instance, Business Studies to run a short course in basic skills for business.

During the course the students gain competences in literacy and numeracy within the ALBSU/City and Guilds 3793 (Wordpower) and 3794 (Numberpower) framework. The Business Studies Section agrees as part of the programme to accept onto BTEC Business courses students who gain a minimum number of basic skills competences during the course.

These 'compact' type programmes benefit college and students. They enable adults and young people to see possible progression routes; they allow colleges to admit non-traditional students after a period of support during which students have improved their basic and study skills.

There are particular issues that relate to widening access for adults with English language needs. Many people have acquired vocational and professional qualifications in their country of origin, that they are unable to use directly in the UK. Some colleges have established short courses that develop 'transferable skills'. Language support, training in specific machinery and work processes used in Britain are taught, to bring adults' skills in line with UK requirements. Other colleges have developed short, 'fast lane', intensive courses to help adults with ESOL needs acquire the language skills needed to cope with the demands of a particular course.

"Community based basic skills provision is essential and it needs to be close to where students live."

There are some key elements of community based provision which all colleges need to ensure mark their own programmes. These include:

- *small learning groups of between 6-8 students per paid tutor*
- *locally based learning opportunities*
- *adequate staff time for outreach and support for community based provision*
- *reasonable accommodation for learning groups*
- *access to a range of learning material.*

Some colleges will want to 'contract' some of the provision of community based skills work to existing community education services in a local area. Colleges will need to ensure, however, that these arrangements do not artificially separate community based groups from the primary activities of the college. Moreover, the quality standards that apply to college provision should be equally relevant to community based opportunities.

Action Points

- **Plan and provide basic skills in community settings.**
- **Make a choice of learning styles available to basic skills students.**
- **Ensure links between community based provision and the rest of the college's basic skills programme.**
- **Map and develop progression routes to college courses for basic skills students.**
- **Develop 'compact' arrangements between basic skills provision and vocational courses.**

Learning Material

LEARNING material plays an important part in basic skills work. There are few worthwhile 'set books' and the need to avoid the use of children's books and material means that a great deal of effort is needed by staff to identify, obtain and produce learning material. Basic skills is truly materials intensive and budgets and staffing need to reflect this.

In general, whilst the material available for use in basic skills is better than it was a few years ago, there are still some glaring gaps. We know that there is not enough vocationally related and occupationally specific material available, although this is likely to improve in the next few years. Nor is there enough computer based material and the costs involved in generating software may mean that development is likely to be fairly slow.

Obtaining a good range of commercially produced material is the first step in ensuring that a workshop is well stocked and that learning groups, whether in the college or in the community, have access to, and choice of, material. Information is available about material for use in basic skills in the form of resource directories and we have included some of these in the bibliography. Although it is not yet in existence, ALBSU is establishing a National Basic Skills Collection at the Institute of Education, close to our London offices. This will be housed as part of the new Library at the Institute and will allow staff from throughout England and Wales the opportunity to look at learning and teaching material.

It is worth looking at commercially based material before investing a great deal of time and energy in developing material locally. There is, of course, some material which needs to be produced in-house because it deals with an essentially local need and situation. However, rather too much time has been wasted in recent years through the production of not very good quality material which duplicates better material which is already readily available. ALBSU supports the development of FE resource based learning consortia. Hopefully this will increasingly allow colleges to obtain locally produced material from colleges in other areas.

As well as print material – both commercial and produced in-house – it is essential that other resources are available, including computers, CD-ROMs and audio and video material. Some technology needs to be largely dedicated for use in basic skills; alongside this, however, there needs to be greater access to existing hardware in colleges. It is often not lack of hardware that's the problem but lack of access. Colleges make substantial use of new technology in their teaching and learning methodologies. It is crucial that the technological resources of the college are available to basic skills students.

An increasing amount of good software for basic skills work is becoming available for IBM, Nimbus and Apple Macintosh computers. Equipment of this standard should be accessible for basic skills tuition. The latest developments in basic skills work include interactive video using CD ROM-XA, which can provide high quality learning opportunities for basic level students. The first step in assessing the suitability of material for use in basic skills is to ensure that college staff are aware of what resources are already available in the college which could be used with students who want basic skills support.

It is important that the material available for use to improve basic skills by students on college courses covers the curricular range of the college. Some colleges already provide a large amount of worksheet-based material for Maths and English workshops, although much of this material starts at too high a level, typically at GCSE English or Maths. More material is needed at a lower level if existing workshops are to cope with basic skills as well as other learning support needs. Every workshop in every college should include material which allows staff to help with basic spelling problems, place value or an understanding of the four rules of number.

"Basic skills is truly materials intensive and budgets and staffing need to reflect this."

There is a growing bank of resources produced by colleges to help students improve basic skills as part of obtaining an NVQ. For example, some colleges are presently working on providing material in basic skills competence in a number of areas and levels, including Hairdressing NVQ 2, Farm Machinery Year 1, Agriculture NVQ 1, Construction NVQs 1 & 2, Retail NVQ 1, Horticulture Year 1, and RDDC (Care) NVQ. Lead Industry Bodies are also recognising the importance of good basic skills, both in the acquisition of competence and in the transferability of skills to different contexts. In the construction industry, for example, the basic skills demands within the core skills elements of Construction NVQs are being compared with a view to closer linkage with the Basic Skills Accreditation Initiative (BSAI) standards.

The learning material available to students in community based provision must be of equally high quality. Steps need to be taken to ensure a regular updating of material in local centres and off-site classes. A core of material should be provided, so that staff can cater for a range of basic skills need. The ALBSU publication, *Resources*, gives advice on the content and level of such core material. Ideally there should be good access to video recorders and computers, although this may depend on the nature of the off-site location. What is most important, however, is that students in community based provision know about, and have access to the enhanced range of material and equipment located in other parts of the college.

The resources available in college workshop provision should be seen as the central resource that can be drawn on by staff and students in community based classes. Such an arrangement provides an economy of scale: while it is not possible to provide the same amount of material in a community centre that is available at the college workshop, staff should be able to borrow books, take copies of material and equipment for use with students in local provision.

Action Points

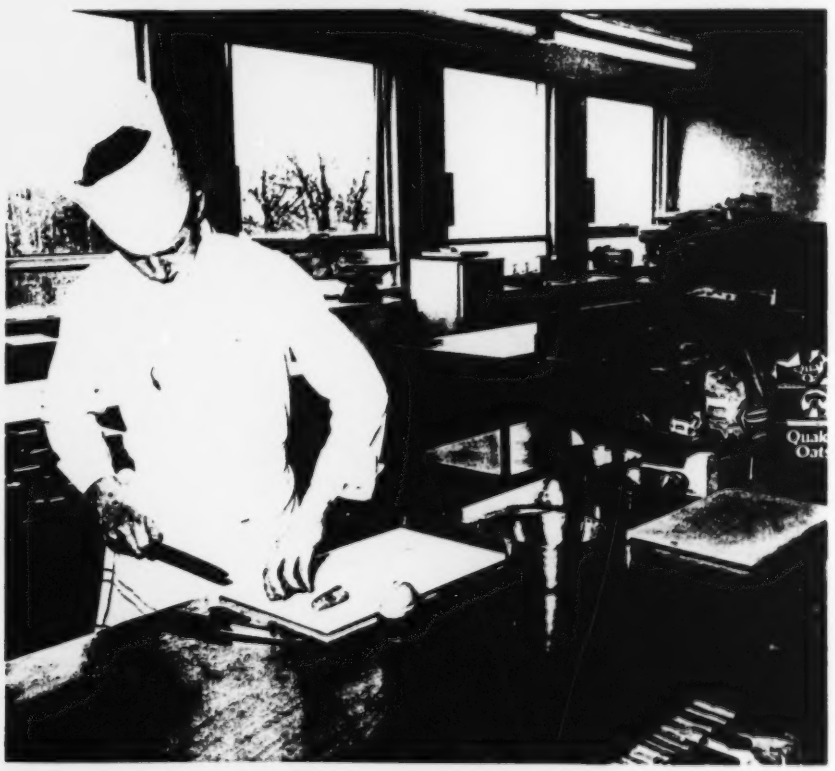
- Establish an annual budget for basic skills materials.
- Ensure that basic skills students have adequate access to new technology.
- Provide core basic skills materials in all community based provision.

Accreditation

IT is important that students improving basic skills are able to gain accreditation for progress made and competence achieved. Accreditation improves and strengthens motivation and provides evidence for employers, other educational and training institutions and family and friends of real achievement. Crucially, recognised accreditation improves the chance of access to further education and training, promotion at work or permanent employment.

It is essential that accreditation in basic skills is recognised and valued. Young people and adults improving basic skills will not be easily 'fobbed off' with certificates which have no value and lack real rigour. The days of issuing certificates for use as wall hangings are long gone. ALBSU believes that it is important that accreditation in basic skills is consistent with NVQs and relates to previous study, such as the National Curriculum in schools. Accreditation should allow progression and should be part of a framework of APEL which recognises competences already gained. The developing Open College Networks in various parts of England and Wales provide an interesting approach to APEL and progression and some colleges are already involved in Open College Networks. The existence of effective Open College Networks can combine with a coherent system of competence based accreditation of basic skills to enable easier progression and credit accumulation towards nationally recognised qualifications.

"Young people and adults improving basic skills will not be easily 'fobbed off' with certificates which have no value and lack real vigour."



ALBSU, in partnership with the BBC, DES and Employment Department has developed a framework for accrediting competences in literacy and numeracy which are related to NVQs. The competences developed as part of the BSAI are already part of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) competences bank and have been developed as national basic skills awards by City and Guilds. Other awarding bodies are also using these competences to develop national awards. Encouragingly many TECs now accept City and Guilds 3793/4 *(Wordpower* and *Numberpower)* accreditation as acceptable outcomes for training programmes.

The basic skills competences which have been developed by ALBSU and our partners can be used in a vocational context as part of a vocational college course and for many students this is the way they want to learn. For example:

- *an understanding of area and its measurement is necessary to many areas of the construction industry, including plastering;*
- *an ability to retrieve information from written sources is required in clerical and administration, but is also needed by warehouse and stores staff, retail staff and workers in many other areas.*

The introduction of the National Curriculum and Attainment Targets will have a profound effect not just on schools but on further education and basic skills. In the years ahead, young people and adults will want to improve the level of mastery of basic skills they achieved at school and obtain accreditation which recognises additional competence gained since the age of 16. If this type of accreditation is not available their school record, and the level of attainment achieved, will follow them throughout their working life.

As part of BSAI, ALBSU has mapped the levels of the City and Guilds certificates across to the Attainment Targets in the English and Mathematics National Curriculum and made this information widely available. It is not an exact process as the National Curriculum is not competence based as such, but it does allow a comparison for employers, educational institutions and individuals which we believe will be helpful.

For many basic skills students in community based provision, the accreditation systems now in development offer a 'passport' into further training opportunities in further or higher education. Therefore, while it is important to develop the in-college links between the BSAI standards achieved by students and the basic skills required within NVQs, it is essential that such systems are applied throughout the college's basic skills service.

Action Points

- **Ensure that all students have access to nationally recognised accreditation in basic skills.**
- **Build accreditation of competence in basic skills into core skills elements of vocational courses.**
- **Record achievements of basic skills competences in students' National Records of Achievement.**

Staff Development and Training

ALTHOUGH almost all staff can help students with a specific basic skills problems – and all staff should be encouraged to do so – teaching basic skills is a specialist job. Certainly it is no place for the well meaning amateur. Most colleges will require a range of levels of expertise for providing basic skills support and teaching.

At one level, vocational staff need to be able to recognise basic skills difficulties as they arise and either give the minimal help required or refer the student concerned for further help. On another level, specialist basic skills staff need expertise in diagnosing problems and formulating learning plans and teaching approaches for students with more serious difficulties or needing longer-term help.

All of this is important when considering the recruitment and employment of staff as well as staff development and training. Staff development and training is an important element of quality assurance, because in general well trained staff will provide a high quality service.

ALBSU has recently developed a framework for staff training and accreditation which is just as relevant for colleges as for other basic skills providers. Many colleges already offer the *ALBSU/City and Guilds Initial Certificate in Teaching Basic Skills (9282/3/4)* and a substantial number of staff working in colleges have received the Certificate. The Initial Certificate is a 30 hour programme of pre-service training for staff teaching literacy, numeracy or ESOL and we believe that in the next few years this will be an essential qualification for staff new to basic skills work. Over the next few years ALBSU is making funds available to support the introduction and development of these pre-service qualifications and, thus, at a difficult time colleges should be able to get some help with costs.

The Initial Certificate should be useful for vocational staff who want to improve their ability to help students with basic skills needs as well as new basic skills staff. It provides an essential grounding and helps staff to:

- *understand the nature of basic skills problems among young people and adults*
- *recognise and assess need*
- *provide help*
- *assess progress.*

Some colleges have run specific courses adapted to meet the needs of vocational lecturers, sometimes in collaboration with neighbouring colleges, whilst others have sent staff to courses run by other organisations such as training providers or adult education centres. Within the framework of the Initial Certificate it is possible to focus on specific needs of vocational staff. For example, assessing the accessibility and readability of course material formed an important module of one college's Initial Certificate course. Another focussed on the language needs of students and the resulting requirement to deliver some parts of the course in a different way.

The Initial Certificate only provides a basic grounding however and specialist staff need more in-depth training. The *ALBSU/City and Guilds In-service Certificate in Teaching Basic Skills (9285)* is designed to improve and develop skills in teaching, assessment and curriculum development for basic skills staff. The Certificate is competence based rather than a specific course and, although it has mainly been provided regionally in the past some colleges have recently registered to offer the Certificate direct. Other colleges 'buy-in' to neighbouring colleges or other centres which are registered with City and Guilds. ALSBU is making some limited financial help available to colleges sponsoring staff to take the Certificate over the next few years.

"Staff development and training is an important element of quality assurance, because in general well trained staff will provide a high quality service."

The development of new approaches such as open and flexible learning and workshops, competence-based accreditation, workplace basic skills training courses and the demand for help with ESOL in areas with little experience or tradition in language teaching has emphasised the need for staff development and on-going training. Qualifications and training undertaken some years ago are unlikely to equip staff for the challenges of the 1990s. Indeed, in the experience of one college, although nearly all staff working in basic skills in the college had achieved the RSA Diploma in Teaching Adult Literacy in the 1970s, the quality of the provision was poor and approaches appeared to be dated. Up-skilling had become a major priority for the staff and the college.

The training of staff involved in basic skills should not always be seen as a separate activity, however. Increasingly staff in colleges are receiving management training, including budgetary control and planning, resources use and allocation, personnel procedures etc, and this is important for key staff managing and organising basic skills programmes. Total Quality Management (TQM) will depend to a large extent on the skills of key staff and a number of colleges are sponsoring staff to take management training, often as part of the Management Charter Initiative (MCI). It is important to remember that this is just as, if not more, important for basic skills key staff as for other people working in the college.

Action Points

- Ensure that all staff providing basic skills receive initial training leading to nationally recognised qualifications.
- Provide regular opportunities for staff to acquire higher level qualifications in the teaching of basic skills.
- Establish a programme of staff development and training for college staff working in basic skills.
- Include key basic skills staff in management training.

Funding

FUNDING is never easy. It is often even more difficult when it relates to an area of college work which is not confined to a particular department or section. Yet without an adequate funding base, a cross college policy quickly becomes more rhetoric than reality. Frankly basic skills work is never likely to become an income generator and it is often more costly than some other further education provision. The need for lower SSRs (Staff/Student Ratios), additional learning resources and enhanced staff training means that basic skills can seem expensive. We realise that at a time of 'stretched' resources, basic skills may appear to some to be bit of a luxury.

It is to the credit of colleges that few have taken a negative view. Most colleges understand the need to develop provision for non-traditional students and for young people and adults who have additional support needs. Developing 'community colleges' has an added impetus for most Governing Bodies and senior staff, particularly as without an improvement in the coherence of our confusing and incoherent post school education system, we are not likely to be able to compete with other industrialised countries. Nor are we going to be able to escape from the generally held view that we are an under-educated and under-trained nation.

Basic skills is an essential investment. If students who need basic skills support cannot get it from the outset, they are unlikely to complete the course successfully and represent a costly waste of resources. Output related funding means that basic skills support is more, not less, important for every college.

"Most colleges understand the need to develop provision for non-traditional students and for young people and adults who have additional support needs."

Many colleges fund basic skills support as a cross-college service. Some have top-sliced the budgets of departments or sections where students are likely to need the service, whilst others have top-sliced all departments and sections in the belief that basic skills is everyone's responsibility. Other colleges have established specific departments which are responsible for basic skills across the college and fund them in a similar way to other departments within the college.

However it is funded, it is important that there is an identified budget available for basic skills work and support. The budget will need to take account of resources needed to provide teaching and support for students in the college on other courses as well as the costs of any community based provision, including outreach work. Staffing costs will form a significant element of the budget and these need to be realistically estimated. Too much basic skills work has depended on the good-will and often gross exploitation of poorly paid, lowly graded staff and this approach will never assure quality. Moreover, staffing needs to be based on more sensitive criteria than teaching or class contact hours if outreach, support and liaison are to be effective. The development of open learning, wider self-access to learning material and supported self study mean that calculations based on teaching hours of staff will increasingly seem inappropriate and out-dated. We recognise that we might be 'going against the grain' but firmly believe that more sensitive ways of estimating will become more common.

As well as the costs of staffing, there are other costs that need to be included in the budget for basic skills. These include the cost of:

- *staff development*
- *learning and teaching material*
- *outreach, publicity and recruitment*
- *accreditation.*

ALBSU believes that basic skills teaching and support should be available free of charge to all young people and adults irrespective of means. We take the view that these skills are so

crucial in an industrialised society that no barriers should be placed in the way of people who need to learn or improve these skills. We don't believe that this is a hopelessly idealistic position (although we recognise that not everyone shares our view) particularly as people have paid for basic education once already and it is society's responsibility to ensure that they achieve a reasonable level of mastery. Almost all other industrialised countries do not charge for these essential skills and it is about time that we in the UK acknowledged the acquisition of basic skills as a right and not a privilege.

There is some evidence that even the lowest of fees deter some people who wish to improve basic skills from taking up opportunities. On the other hand there is no evidence as far as we can see which indicates that when people pay they drop-out less or appreciate the service more. Of course, employers, training organisations and other institutions may properly be charged for services provided by the college, including basic skills teaching and training.

Action Points

- Establish a specific budget for basic skills.
- Ensure that the budget for basic skills programmes reflects realistic cost including low staff-student ratio, outreach, staff training and support, etc.
- Make basic skills provision available free of charge to the student.

Evaluating Effectiveness

IT is just as important to measure the effectiveness of basic skills provision as to judge the effectiveness of other college services. A high cost, low return service will not survive for long and is unlikely to gain the support of other college sectors and departments. On the other hand, an inadequately funded service will never deliver the outcomes or quality of provision which justify even a modest outlay.

Judging effectiveness in basic skills is not a simple task. Often too little information exists on real cost or on retention rates, progression or attendance patterns. A great deal of work will be needed in the next few years to improve the information available. Technology already exists to improve record keeping and information flow but all too often basic skills staff do not have access either to the hardware or to the necessary training. At present, judging effectiveness is fairly 'rough and ready' where it takes place at all.

"An inadequately funded service will never deliver the outcomes or quality of provision which justify even a modest outlay."

In 1990 ALBSU published a discussion document, *Evaluating Effectiveness in Adult Literacy and Basic Skills,* which contained a Checklist for basic skills programmes and proposed some 'Programme Indicators'. Although the Document was primarily developed for use by Local Education Authorities, in the context of their overall provision, a number of colleges have used the Checklist to evaluate the effectiveness of their basic skills work. Later in 1992 we intend to produce specific advice for colleges on evaluating the effectiveness of their provision.

We are also planning to set minimum standards of practice and performance for basic skills and provide information for students and potential students on what they should expect to receive from any organisation providing basic skills tuition or support. We will help colleges and other providers which accept these minimum standards of practice and performance to achieve them over the next few years and, by 1995, we hope that all recognised providers of basic skills will meet these standards.

Although the standards still have to be finalised it is likely that colleges and other organisations which were able to meet the following would be seen as 'recognised' basic skills providers.

- *A confidential, personal interview before beginning tuition.*
- *A choice of at least two different learning opportunities.*
- *At least one learning opportunity within 30 minutes travel from the student's home.*
- *Support with basic skills for students on other college courses.*
- *Respect for a student's gender and cultural identity.*
- *A negotiated 'learning plan' at the outset of tuition.*
- *Regular assessment of progress.*
- *Access to progression including guidance and advice.*
- *Access to recognised accreditation.*
- *Being taught by staff trained to recognised standards.*
- *A minimum standard of accommodation used for tuition.*
- *Access to a range of suitable teaching and learning material.*
- *Teaching staff able to ensure that tuition takes account of the context of the programme.*

Action Points

- Evaluate current provision against ALBSU standards.
- Set targets for meeting all standards within a fixed time-table.
- Ensure that all staff involved in management and delivery of basic skills understand and recognise standards.

HELP FROM ALBSU

ALBSU can help colleges develop basic skills work in a number of ways.

- **Consultancy**

ALBSU can help colleges assess their current basic skills provision and advise on how it might be strengthened and developed. Consultancy services are available to colleges free of charge and reports are confidential to the college.

- **Local Development Projects**

ALBSU sponsors a range of short, development projects to enhance progression for basic skills students, assist the expansion of learning support in colleges and develop short courses and distance learning. Projects can be funded for up to one year.

- **Staff Development and Training**

ALBSU makes an annual grant available for a limited programme of staff development and training, linked to national qualifications. It is intended that access to these functions should be open to all providers of basic skills training in an area.

Additionally ALBSU sponsors a number of national innovatory projects in England and Wales. The aim of these projects is to develop methodology in a specific aspect of basic skills work, and to disseminate elements of good practice to institutions and staff. Of particular relevance to colleges is the Special Development Project based at Wakefield District College, which offers support to colleges wanting to develop learning support workshops for basic skills.

- **Learning Material**

ALBSU is one of the main publishers of learning material for basic skills work. Its publications include packs of learning material, reading books, training manuals, computer software, video and audio cassettes and publicity material.

CONCLUSION

ALBSU believes that colleges of further education will need to play an increasing role in basic skills work in the next few years. We support improving the coherence of post-school education and training and the development of genuine community colleges. Colleges can provide high quality learning opportunities for young people and adults, whether in the college on a specific course or in the wider community, although we recognise that some colleges need advice and support in establishing provision.

We can not provide all of the support needed. We are committed to assisting colleges as far as we can, however, through the provision of free consultancy and advice, sponsoring development work, helping resource staff training and publishing vocationally and occupationally related basic skills material. Advice and support will also be available through ALBSU funded national Special Development Projects. We want your help; in turn we will help you to develop an effective basic skills service.

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The following materials will be useful to college staff in the development of basic skills provision:

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ALBSU

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